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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard                "Saying it like it is!"
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I really gotta stop looking at calendars! Less than two weeks from now and
we will all (hopefully) be sitting down celebrating a nice Thanksgiving meal.
As far as meals go, Thanksgiving is my most favorite - especially when I do
the cooking at our house - as opposed to going somewhere else for the meal.
I've been cooking Thanksgiving turkeys (and most of the fixings!) since I
was in college. I just really enjoy cooking that particular meal. And I'll
be doing it again this year, even though it will just be my wife and I this
year. More leftovers for us!!

Anyway, this is also around the time of the year when I start thinking about
where we're going with A-ONE. How is our readership doing; and just as
importantly, how are we doing?

Atari-related news - well, there's really no Atari news these days, only
bits and pieces that are Atari-related, or the rare projects that some
Atari enthusiasts are still working on (thankfully!). To be perfectly
honest with you, there's only so much that Joe and I can contribute to
this weekly magazine. Without the Atari user, there's hardly a thing.
Sure, we can reminisce all we want, but that can get tiresome after
awhile - for us and for you. While it's true that there are a couple of
long-time A-ONE fans who occasionally send us some articles or point us
in certain directions to find news, we really could use a lot more to keep
you even more interested.

In the past, I've tried to solicit ideas and stories from you, our readers.
Not many takers, and for a short period of time - real short! If you're
still using Atari computers, or Atari software, you must have something
to say that would interest other Atari users. Send us something, anything,
to include in an upcoming issue. A favorite memory. A favorite program.
A favorite developer. A favorite Atari show. Pet project. Anything!
You don't need to be a polished writer - we'll clean it up for you if it
needs it. We'd just like to be able to share more with our readers; and
you can help us to do that. So, think about it. Even if it's just an idea,
let us know - we'd really appreciate hearing from you. Now, on with the show!

Until next time...

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                         PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Thanksgiving is getting closer and closer (or farther and farther away, if you live in Canada [grin]), and you know that Christmas is never far behind. It's time to start thinking of ways to cook the turkey. I love turkey. There's nothing like a roasted gobbler for a holiday meal.. the heady smell filling the house as it cooks, the stuffing (or dressing, depending on your vernacular), all the memories of holidays past neatly packed into the scent invading your nostrils with each breath. Yeah, THAT says 'holiday'! Did I mention that I love turkey?

Well, since Thanksgiving is less that two weeks away, it's time for me to start hammering at you about donating food again. Yeah, I know, I do it every year. But y'know what? There's a NEED every year. This year more than most, too.

And I know many of you have heard this story before, but I'm going to tell you about how Harry Chapin (Taxi, Cat's In The Cradle) slapped me around and drove home to me exactly how important it is to donate.

It happened at a concert. Harry Chapin was one of my all-time favorites, and I was in my glory. I'd spent most of my disposable income for the month on a couple of cassette tapes and a couple of concert tee shirts, and waited patiently for the show intermission so that I could have Harry Chapin himself sign either my program or my tee.

Intermission came, and I stood in the line snaking through the place, leading to an out of the way corner where Harry and a couple of the guys from the group sat, signing and chatting with show-goers.

My turn finally came, and I told Harry that I really really liked his music, and proudly said that his attitude about donating to charities had spurred me on to donate the bonus I'd gotten for the previous Thanksgiving and Christmas to the local soup kitchen and homeless shelter.

He paused for a second and looked at me and said, "So what?"

It struck me like a slap in the face, I can tell you. I mean, here was somebody that I really looked up to... someone who had shown me that it was good to give to charity... and now that I was telling him that I'd done what he'd said we all should do he says 'so what?'? Yikes!

He softened a bit... but only a bit... and said something like; "Look, people go hungry every day of the year, not just Thanksgiving. Yeah, you did good, kid. You gave someone a good meal. But we need more than that. We need to keep doing it and keep telling other people to do it."

Again, that's not a direct quote, but that's the general idea.

He continued on about how each of us had to do what we could and that that was the only way that we were ever going to put an end some of the problems facing us. I could see one of his brothers (I won't say which, but if you know anything about the band, you know which one it was already) rolling his eyes and getting impatient. "...And it's important that each one of us does as much as possible to help out" Harry finished.

"I wish I could do more," I told him, "but I can't do everything that I WANT".

He chuckled and, without skipping a beat said, "So do what you can! Ya get just what you pay for.." and trailed off as he chuckled, moving on to the poor patient soul who'd had the misfortune to get stuck in line behind me. I didn't put it together right then, but those words were from one of his songs. I don't remember now if I'd heard "Odd Job Man" before that night or if it was afterward, but it really doesn't matter, since the song didn't have anything to do with the charity; I just thought it was cute. The line from the song is "I give part time help - I'm the odd job man - I can't do what I want - So I do what I can - And I tell you now - So that you will understand - You get just what you pay for from the odd job man".

So there you have it, my memory of Harry Chapin. In a way, I'm kind of carrying on just by telling you the story and urging you to grab a couple extra cans of something the next time you go shopping... you don't have to donate an entire turkey and all the fixin's, but a box of stuffing or a can of cranberry sauce or even a jar of gravy is a good start, and won't hurt too much. And if you can afford to slip a $20 dollar bill in an envelope and donate that too, good for you!

Yes, that's right; good for YOU. Giving is kind of like exercising: It might hurt a little bit at first, but the more you do it the more you'll enjoy it and the better you'll be at it. And yeah, someone else will benefit from it, but it's only when a bunch of us all do it together that we make some progress.

And please don't forget that Christmas is a mere 4 weeks after Thanksgiving. Here's an interesting 'exercise'... every time you go shopping, pick up a little something extra... a can of green beans, a box of stuffing, cereal, whatever... and at the end of the month just drop it off at the shelter or soup kitchen or church or synagogue or temple. A lot of these organizations also put together 'baskets' to give to people who need it. My mother would blanch in embarrassment at my telling you this, but there was a year when my family received a couple of those 'care packages'. I can tell you honestly that it made a world of difference. You see, my father had been out of work after back surgery, and the family income was... severely curtailed. I'm the oldest of seven kids, and believe me when I tell you that having something special on the table for Thanksgiving made me incredibly thankful. It's not that there was anything very special in that basket... some canned goods, some dry foods... stuffing, rice, instant mashed potatoes, etc... but it was all greatly appreciated. It still is, right to this very day.

And now, even though things are... ummm... tight, I'm giving back what I can... a bag of something here, a box or can of something there. And maybe, if we can manage it, a turkey for a shelter or soup kitchen.

I WAS going to go into a rant about two of my favorite 'Barbie Dolls'... Sarah Palin and Carrie Prejean, but this is not the time. I really hate the idea of 'dirtying' this week's column with talk about politics.

Suffice it to say that I think that anyone who runs for political office should be able to find Africa on a map and realize that it's a continent (isn't that any letter that's not a vowel?? [evil grin]) and not a country, and that anyone who's allowed to complain about First Amendment rights should have to actually read the First Amendment. Maybe I'll rant about that next week. For this week, I'm going to go to the grocery store

and pick up a couple of extra odds and ends. How about you?

That's it for this week, kiddies. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Modern Warfare 2" Strikes!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   'Natal' Launch Date Leaked!
                                      Xbox Live Users Banned!
                                      And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                  "Modern Warfare 2" Strikes on Tuesday

"Modern Warfare 2" strikes on Tuesday in a worldwide assault eagerly
anticipated by lovers of the blockbuster role-playing battle videogame
franchise.

Videogame publisher Activision Blizzard believes that the sixth
installment in the "Call of Duty" franchise could be the most powerful
entertainment industry launch of the year, outshining even Hollywood
blockbusters.

Activision has predicted that "MW2" will be such a hit that the
California-based company will see record operating margins. Pre-orders
for the 60-dollar (US) videogame are the highest in the firm's history.

"We're already seeing it bully other name-brand competitors into pushing
their release dates back rather than risk going head-to-head in the same
launch window," said Scott Steinberg of videogame and gadget website
Digital Trends.

"Put simply, if you only buy a single game this Hanukkah or Christmas,
this is the title to beat."

Analysts expect "Modern Warfare" to blast new life into a videogame
industry that has seen sales figures this year hobbled by dismal
economic conditions and a dearth of hot releases.

US videogame sales showed a modest increase in September, breaking a
six-month losing streak.

Sales would have to skyrocket in the remaining months of the year just

to meet last year's numbers.

"Modern Warfare" is expected to delight mainstream videogame players along with the franchise's fan base of "hardcore" gamers thrilled by first-person shooter titles.

"It's designed to be as much of a breathlessly cinematic experience as simple run-n-gun outing," Steinberg said.

"Beyond offering tremendous value courtesy of both its single and multiplayer options, it's also a surefire home theater showpiece."

Multiplayer options allow people share consoles or link on the Internet to play together as characters in the videogame as an alternative to going solo.

Reviewers have heaped early praise on "MW2" for its game play and vivid graphics.

"Fire it up on a new LCD or plasma HDTV, and it's all but guaranteed to make the neighbors' jaws drop," Steinberg said.

The game is rated for people ages 17 or older and "MW2" has stirred a bit of controversy for depicting realistically brutal terrorist encounters.

Infinity Ward created the videogame, with versions tailored to Microsoft Xbox 360; Sony PlayStation 3, and Nintendo Wii videogame consoles.

"Everyone on the team is laser focused on making the most gripping experience we've ever created," said Infinity Ward chief executive Vince Zampella.

"No detail is too small and every finishing touch imaginable is underway to make 'Modern Warfare 2' our best ever."

"MW2" picks up in the wake of its predecessor, which reportedly sold 12 million copies.

Players join a global military task force taking on ultranationalist Russian terrorists to save the world. Settings include Russia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Brazil.

The "Call of Duty" franchise that has won a devoted following since its launch in 2003 and boasts overall sales of about 28 million units.

US videogame retail chain Game Stop is planning to have thousands of its shops open at midnight Monday to begin "MW2" sales with Tuesday's arrival.

Leaked: Project Natal Launch Date November 2010

Project Natal will be available worldwide November 2010, launch with 14 games, and sell for less than 50 Euros, or about 80 US dollars, according to games biz site MCV.

Expect 5 million units for global ship at release, with at least two purchase configurations: As a solo upgrade, or bundled with the Xbox 360 console itself.

MCV says its sources for the information had access to a secret tour Microsoft's been conducting in the UK to demonstrate Natal's technology to certain publishers and studios. Apparently the tour was designed to drum up developer support for the device.

If $80 sounds cheap, a publisher told MCV Microsoft's trying to get it even lower, aiming for "impulse" territory that could drop the tag to as little as £30, or about 50 US dollars.

Microsoft unveiled Natal this summer at E3 in Los Angeles.
The device uses various cameras and microphones to track player movement and audio, allowing for what the company calls a "controller-free" experience.

At the Tokyo Game Show last month, top-tier publishers and developers including Activision, Bethesda, Capcom, Disney, EA, Konami, MTV, Namco Bandai, Sega, Square Enix, THQ and Ubisoft committed to design games for the device.

Microsoft Bans Up to One Million Users From Xbox Live

Microsoft has banned as many as one million users who hacked their Xbox 360 consoles to play pirated games from the company's Xbox Live service in a bid to counter piracy. The move triggered an avalanche of cheap "chipped" Xbox 360 consoles for sale on Craigslist and a public outcry from users is expected.

The ban from the Xbox Live service is reported to affect anywhere between 600,000 to one million Xbox 360 users who altered their console in order to play games downloaded illegally from the Internet. Microsoft says that this violates the Xbox Live terms of use, and consequently access to the service has been cut.

The launch of the widely expected Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 game for the Xbox 360 probably is what triggered Microsoft's move. Illegal copies of the game have reportedly showed up on various download sites, days before its official release.

Microsoft says the Xbox Live online gaming service serves more than 20 million users worldwide. The Redmond giant added that modifying the Xbox 360 console to play pirated discs violates the Xbox Live terms of use, hence voiding the warranty and resulting in a ban from the online gaming service.

Microsoft also reassured those who purchased a genuine copy of the Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 game and played the game on an unmodified Xbox 360 that no action will be taken against them. But many are out of luck, as one Xbox 360 gamer explains his ordeal of being cut off from the Xbox Live service in a BBC report. He also explains how he saved almost $1,000 by playing illegal games on his hacked console.

A banned Xbox 360 console from the Xbox Live service does not render the console useless though. Users can play games, but the online multiplayer service will not be available to them. The only way to get back using the service is to purchase a new Xbox 360 console, without any modifications to it.

Following this ban, a large number of modded Xbox 360 consoles are being put up for sale on sites such as Craigslist. The average price for such a console is now around $90, much under the normal market price of around $200. Precaution when buying such a console is advised, as Microsoft warned that anyone who accidentally purchased a modded Xbox 360 console would not receive any help or compensation from the company.

It is yet to be seen whether the mass of banned Xbox 360 owners will migrate to competing gaming consoles, such as Sony's PlayStation 3. If you were banned from the Xbox Live service, please share your experience in the comments.

Banned Xbox 360s Flooding Craigslist, Ebay

Beware of banned Xbox 360s loosed in ballooning numbers on auction sites and distribution lists featuring online classified ads. In the wake of Microsoft's ban of between "a small percentage" or "around 600,000" or "up to one million players" (depending who you read), the Xbox-*excommunicated* are apparently leaping overboard to offer their 'modified' Xbox 360 systems rife with dozens of games, extra controllers, special revs of custom firmware, all for anywhere from a buck to the price of a new system on up to boutique (perhaps joke) pricing of over a thousand dollars.

Last Wednesday, November 4, Microsoft's Larry 'Major Nelson' Hryb explained the company had been "actively banning consoles from Xbox LIVE that have been modified to play pirated games." Hryb also noted that "the warranty on an Xbox 360 console is not transferrable, and if you purchase a used console that has been previously banned, you will not be able to connect to Xbox LIVE."

The systems haven't been "bricked," in other words, meaning they'll still turn on and players can still use them to play pirated games offline, but their ability to connect online - even employing an unbanned Xbox LIVE account--has been permanently compromised.

The race is on to to offload banned systems, apparently. A search on "modded xbox" run against the the New York City Craiglist portal brought back over 200 listings from November 5. Another through the Chicago Craiglist portal returned 195 listings for the same period.

"[I'm] looking to sell my banned modded xbox 360," reads one New York Craiglist ad. "[I] own all the originals...but wanted to have extra incase [sic] the originals got scratched."

The "backups" include games like Forza 3, Call of Duty: World at War, Halo 3: ODST (on two discs), Batman: Arkham Asylum, and Brutal Legend, as well as movies like Up and Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs.

Of course Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs isn't out on DVD or Blu-ray until January 2010, but who's counting.

Another seller in Brooklyn admits to being banned, but claims you can still play online: "THIS XBOX 360 IS BANNED FROM XBOX LIVE BUT STILL FULLY FUNCTIONAL! GREAT FOR KIDS AND PEOPLE WHO JUST DONT [SIC] FEEL LIKE PAYING FOR THE EXPENSIVE XBOX LIVE. THERES [SIC] MANY WAYS TO PLAY

ONLINE WITHOUT XBOX LIVE!"

One seller in Houston isn't sure what "the going rate for a banned Xbox
is," but will take offers.

Another in the same area assures "all games work perfectly," then adds
"if u are looking for any specific game just tell me and i'll get it for
u."

Curiously, most Craiglist "modded" Xbox 360 sellers are forthcoming
about their console's "banned" status, whereas Ebay sellers acknowledge the
mod-job but often don't specify whether their system's been banned or not.

There's even a WTB or "want to buy" market for banned boxes. One
Craiglist ad reads "I'm looking to buy one of the newly banned X-Box
360's," adding that it needs "to come with some new games such as Modern
Warfare 2 and what not."

It goes without saying, but I will anyway: *Caveat emptor*. If a deal
looks too good to be true, it probably is - now, more so than ever.

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                        A-ONE's Headline News
                   The Latest in Computer Technology News
                        Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

                   CES 2010 Preview: Gloom, But Not Doom

"Green" is the new "black, "flat" is the new "up" and the watchword for
2010 is "apps." And there's no need to wait for Black Friday; it's here
already.

That's the state of the consumer electronics market now--and where it's
headed in 2010--according to Consumer Electronics Association officials
at Tuesday's New York preview of the 2010 International Consumer
Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

While the economic forecast offered by CEA CEO Gary Shapiro and others
was not a sunny one, there were some breaks in the clouds for rising
technologies like 3D television and e-book readers. What was clear is
that consumers are becoming more conscious of eco-friendly "green"
technologies, apps are driving innovation in cell phones and other
devices, and that while many parts of the consumer electronics market
are "flat" and not growing, at least they're not shrinking like they
were in 2008.

"We believe that July will mark the bottom of the recession," says the
CEA's Sean Wargo. "The new 'up' is 'flat.'"

Wargo noted that while unit sales of consumer electronics were down 6.3
percent in the fourth quarter of 2007 when compared to the year before,
the CEA expects an increase of 6 percent in unit sales for the fourth

quarter of 2009. The forecast for revenues from these sales, however, are down: The CEA expects a 7.5 percent drop is expected in the fourth quarter of 2009, which is greater than the 6.4 percent drop in the same time period in 2008.

"Green continues to be the new black," says Wargo, who added that consumers seemed willing to spend a few extra dollars for eco-friendly gear. However, he also noted that consumers were leaning toward spending less this holiday season, a trend which will probably continue into next year. He noted that 60 percent of 8,000 consumer-electronics executives polled for the CEA's study "believe that this frugality is here to stay."

While general spending on gifts this holiday season is expected to grow by 4 percent, spending on technology gifts is expected to grow by 8 percent, noted Steve Koenig, director, industry analysis, at the CEA.

"Apps in a word are omnipresent," says Koenig, who noted that the more than 100,000 apps available for the iPhone have already been downloaded more than two billion times. "Apps," he added, would be "the most frequently spoken word at the 2010 CES."

He noted that apps for things like store-coupon and movie-ticket printing would expand to devices other than cell phones--like PCs and printers. Content providers like ESPN have discovered the value of creating apps for multiple platforms, he says.

Making its first appearance on the CEA's most-wanted-gift list is the e-book reader in sixth place, with Amazon's Kindle leading the market. However this market is clearly still in its infancy, with only 6 percent of technology enthusiasts and 4 percent of the general public owning an e-book reader so far, according to Wargo.

Just behind the Kindle on the most-wanted list was the iPhone in seventh place and Blu-ray players in eighth. Topping the most-wanted list was notebook PCs, with MP3 players in second and flat-panel TVs in third. And netbooks made their first appearance on any of the CEA's lists, this time in ninth-place on the list of most-wanted gifts for teens.

And where do consumers want to shop? "We see mass merchants (Costco, etc.) really eclipsing the electronics stores," says Koenig. "Convenience is a big part of the dynamic this holiday.... People are thinking ahead on return policies when they're making their purchases."

Purchasing appears to be starting earlier than ever, too. "Black Friday has already begun," says Wargo, who noted that most major retail outlets are already neck-deep in price wars. "We've seen Black Friday emerge bigger than ever before. We've seen Black Friday start with a bang."

The International Consumer Electronics Show will run from Jan. 7 to 10, 2010 in Las Vegas.

Rumor Says Google's Chrome OS Close To Release

The next big thing for Google may almost be here. TechCrunch's Michael Arrington reported Friday that a reliable source - he doesn't say whether within or outside the company - tells him that the Chrome operating system will be available "within a week."

The rumors could be true, but shoppers shouldn't expect to be able to buy a Chrome-driven netbook anytime soon, said Jeff Orr, a senior analyst for ABI Research. "Reading into it from my own experience doing launches and the general history, this may be a developer's preview or something along those lines. We will not likely see widespread availability from netbook manufacturers. I think the second half of 2010 is still correct for that."

The idea of an incremental release - not a full-blown introduction - was echoed by Andrew Borg, a senior research analyst for wireless and mobility for the Aberdeen Group. Borg said netbooks driven by the Chrome OS are extremely unlikely to be on store shelves for the holidays, though a demonstration model and a release to developers is possible.

Plans for the Chrome OS were unveiled during the first week in July. The introductory blog posting, attributed to Sundar Pichai, Google's vice president of product management, and Linus Upson, the company's engineering director, called the Chrome OS a "natural extension" of the Chrome browser.

The July 7 posting said the Chrome browser aims at folks who spend most of their time on the web. It relies, however, on operating systems introduced before the web existed. The Chrome OS, the post said, is designed to provide the browser with more appropriate support.

The post goes into some detail on the operating system. The theme is that the open-source OS will be lightweight and most of the heavy lifting will be shifted to the Web. A FAQ added to the blog on July 8 said companies working with Google on the Chrome OS include Acer, Adobe, ASUS, Freescale, Hewlett-Packard, Lenovo, Qualcomm, Texas Instruments, and Toshiba.

Orr said it's possible that the OS may find its way into products next spring and a broader spectrum of netbooks with a refresh in the autumn. At this point, however, nothing has been offered to developers to give them a head start.

Some - but not all - developers will be excited, Orr said. "The developer community that is looking to utilize the Web as the primary channel for either runtime or cloud-type services would find the concept of the Chrome OS to be advantageous. It could let them reach more people more quickly," he said. "Companies that have only developed for a particular machine or OSes that run [mostly] on the device may not find as much to rally around."

Borg emphasized that his expectations for the Chrome OS are based on educated guesses, not information that has been given to him or to Aberdeen. He anticipates a browser-like experience with an emphasis on local caching and the ability to run applications in the Chrome user interface.

Borg said the OS will make it easier for the processor's capabilities to be more fully aimed at browsing-related tasks, not at rendering and other operations that are more important in PC and laptop environments. He also expects to see a focus on the caching necessary for effective offline operations. The software development kit for developers, he said, will be optimized for performance in the relatively constrained screen size, memory and processor used in netbooks.

"It certainly should be snappy," he said. "I expect similar interactivity, responsiveness and relatively fast rendering that the Chrome browser delivers."

Google Launches Online Flu Shot Finder

Google on Tuesday launched an online tool for tracking down where to get vaccinations against H1N1 and seasonal influenza in the United States.

The flu-shot finder service went live online at google.com/flushot and will soon be available at flu.gov and websites of the American Lung Association, according to the California-based Internet giant.

"This project is just beginning and we have not yet received information about flu shot clinics for many locations," Roni Zeiger and Jennifer Haroon of Google said in a blog post.

"Especially given slower than expected vaccine production, we think it's important to bring together flu shot information in a coherent manner."

In October, Google expanded a flu-tracking tool to include 16 more countries, analyzing local patterns in search queries to determine the spread of the influenza, and notably swine flu, the H1N1 virus which the World Health Organization labeled a global pandemic earlier this year.

Japan, Russia, and much of Europe are now included at Google Flu Trends. The California Internet powerhouse has also made information available online at google.org/flutrends/ available in 37 languages.

Google had already expanded Flu Trends to include Australia, Mexico, and New Zealand since launching the free tool with US data last November.

Flu Trends counts the number of flu-related queries on the Google Internet search engine and provides estimates on influenza outbreaks in respective regions.

Five Years Ago, Firefox Revived the Browser Market

Firefox is five years old. Five years ago, Microsoft seemed to have an absolute lock on the browser market with Internet Explorer, having long ago crushed Netscape. The browser wars were over. Or so it seemed.

According to Net Applications' Market Share, 64.6 percent of Web users run Internet Explorer, compared to 24 percent running Mozilla's Firefox. Other browsers like Apple's Safari, Google's Chrome, and Opera have another 10 percent of the market. Two years ago, IE controlled almost 80 percent of the browser market and Firefox had only 15 percent.

On a blog celebrating the fifth anniversary of the browser, Mozilla took stock of Firefox's accomplishments. Firefox 1.0 was the forerunner of today's modern browsers -- Safari, Chrome, Opera and Firefox 3.5, Christopher Blizzard writes on the blog.

"The modern browser is built for the future of web applications --

super-fast JavaScript, modern CSS, HTML 5, support for the various web-apps standards, downloadable font support, offline application support, raw graphics through canvas and WebGL, native video, advanced XHR capabilities mixed with new security tools, and network capabilities," Blizzard said.

Firefox has been a major positive for consumers, Tim Bajarin, principal analyst with Creative Strategies, said in an e-mail. "Creating an open-source competitor allows for more flexibility in browser design and also speeds up the development of new features and functions so that it can evolve faster than a corporate browser like IE," he said.

"Consumers like this pace of innovation and Firefox has used this to help them gain serious market share in the browser wars," he added.

There's still much work to be done, Blizzard said, but the technology is in place - thanks to Firefox - to advance the web over the next five years. "We're helping to standardize and implement some new CSS capabilities that are being developed in other browsers, we're leading the web toward a modern font system, and giving web authors and users more security tools," he wrote. "Our job is to help keep the web rich and moving forward - this is a huge part of our public-benefit mission."

A key benefit of Firefox's development over the years has been the web's embrace of standards, which has driven an explosion of latest-generation browsers.

Firefox "set up the current frame for development on the web that we have today," Blizzard said. "It allowed Apple to take KHTML and turn it into Safari, which then allowed Chrome to pick up that work and enter the market and render a standards-based web. Now we don't have just one or two browsers, but many, and a lot of that has to do with the way that early web developers approached development."

While open-source development has clearly opened up the browser market, open-source projects in other markets haven't made much of an impression.

"Other open-source desktop applications, such as OpenOffice, have failed to ignite much user interest," David Coursey wrote in PC World. "You might think Firefox would have encouraged a wave of open-source development, but from the perspective of a typical business or home user, it has not happened. Firefox is the exception that proves the rule: There is no appetite for big open-source development projects (that aren't operating systems)."

What's on tap for the future of Firefox? Issues around data, privacy and identity will "loom large," Blizzard wrote. Standards-based video solutions will develop and mobile will become massively important.

Activists Hijack Facebook Groups 'To Expose Holes'

Activists claimed to have seized control of nearly 300 Facebook community groups in a self-proclaimed effort to expose how vulnerable online reputations are to tampering.

A group called "Control Your Info" (CYI) claimed credit for commandeering 289 Facebook groups, saying it was simple to get into poorly-protected

administrative settings at the website.

"This is just one example that really shows the vulnerabilities of social media," said a blog post at controlyour.info.

"If you chose to express yourself on the Internet, make sure the expressions are your own and not a spammers. This isn't some kind of scare tactic, nor is it a hack, it's a feature that can be used, and is being used, in bad ways."

CYI claimed its motives were pure and that the move was more of a "take-over" than a computer hack of Facebook groups.

Facebook Groups are themed chat venues that users of the social networking service can join to socialize online with people who share interests.

"Facebook Groups suffer from a major flaw," said a message on the CYI blog.

"If an administrator of a group leaves, anyone can register as a new admin. So, in order to take control of a Facebook group, all you really have to do is a quick search on Google."

Once CYI accessed groups as administrators it had authority to change anything, including pictures, descriptions and settings.

CYI fired off messages to the groups telling them they had been "hijacked" and the justification for the attacks. CYI rechristened each group with its name and logo.

CYI promised to restore the violated groups to their original conditions after it makes its point.

"Our main goal is to draw attention to questions concerning online privacy awareness," CYI said. "People have even lost their jobs over Facebook content. We wanted to do something about this."

Facebook said there was no hacking involved and there was no confidential information at risk.

The groups targeted had been abandoned by their owners, which left doors open for group members to make themselves administrators.

"Group administrators have no access to private user information and group members can leave a group at any time," Facebook said.

"In the rare instances when we find that a group has been changed inappropriately, we will disable the group, which is the action we plan for these groups."

Framed for Child Porn - By A PC Virus

Of all the sinister things that Internet viruses do, this might be the worst: They can make you an unsuspecting collector of child pornography.

Heinous pictures and videos can be deposited on computers by viruses -

the malicious programs better known for swiping your credit card numbers. In this twist, it's your reputation that's stolen.

Pedophiles can exploit virus-infected PCs to remotely store and view their stash without fear they'll get caught. Pranksters or someone trying to frame you can tap viruses to make it appear that you surf illegal Web sites.

Whatever the motivation, you get child porn on your computer - and might not realize it until police knock at your door.

An Associated Press investigation found cases in which innocent people have been branded as pedophiles after their co-workers or loved ones stumbled upon child porn placed on a PC through a virus. It can cost victims hundreds of thousands of dollars to prove their innocence.

Their situations are complicated by the fact that actual pedophiles often blame viruses - a defense rightfully viewed with skepticism by law enforcement.

"It's an example of the old 'dog ate my homework' excuse," says Phil Malone, director of the Cyberlaw Clinic at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society. "The problem is, sometimes the dog does eat your homework."

The AP's investigation included interviewing people who had been found with child porn on their computers. The AP reviewed court records and spoke to prosecutors, police and computer examiners.

One case involved Michael Fiola, a former investigator with the Massachusetts agency that oversees workers' compensation.

In 2007, Fiola's bosses became suspicious after the Internet bill for his state-issued laptop showed that he used 4 1/2 times more data than his colleagues. A technician found child porn in the PC folder that stores images viewed online.

Fiola was fired and charged with possession of child pornography, which carries up to five years in prison. He endured death threats, his car tires were slashed and he was shunned by friends.

Fiola and his wife fought the case, spending $250,000 on legal fees. They liquidated their savings, took a second mortgage and sold their car.

An inspection for his defense revealed the laptop was severely infected. It was programmed to visit as many as 40 child porn sites per minute - an inhuman feat. While Fiola and his wife were out to dinner one night, someone logged on to the computer and porn flowed in for an hour and a half.

Prosecutors performed another test and confirmed the defense findings. The charge was dropped - 11 months after it was filed.

The Fiolas say they have health problems from the stress of the case. They say they've talked to dozens of lawyers but can't get one to sue the state, because of a cap on the amount they can recover.

"It ruined my life, my wife's life and my family's life," he says.

The Massachusetts attorney general's office, which charged Fiola,

declined interview requests.

At any moment, about 20 million of the estimated 1 billion Internet-connected PCs worldwide are infected with viruses that could give hackers full control, according to security software maker F-Secure Corp. Computers often get infected when people open e-mail attachments from unknown sources or visit a malicious Web page.

Pedophiles can tap viruses in several ways. The simplest is to force someone else's computer to surf child porn sites, collecting images along the way. Or a computer can be made into a warehouse for pictures and videos that can be viewed remotely when the PC is online.

"They're kind of like locusts that descend on a cornfield: They eat up everything in sight and they move on to the next cornfield," says Eric Goldman, academic director of the High Tech Law Institute at Santa Clara University. Goldman has represented Web companies that discovered child pornographers were abusing their legitimate services.

But pedophiles need not be involved: Child porn can land on a computer in a sick prank or an attempt to frame the PC's owner.

In the first publicly known cases of individuals being victimized, two men in the United Kingdom were cleared in 2003 after viruses were shown to have been responsible for the child porn on their PCs.

In one case, an infected e-mail or pop-up ad poisoned a defense contractor's PC and downloaded the offensive pictures.

In the other, a virus changed the home page on a man's Web browser to display child porn, a discovery made by his 7-year-old daughter. The man spent more than a week in jail and three months in a halfway house, and lost custody of his daughter.

Chris Watts, a computer examiner in Britain, says he helped clear a hotel manager whose co-workers found child porn on the PC they shared with him.

Watts found that while surfing the Internet for ways to play computer games without paying for them, the manager had visited a site for pirated software. It redirected visitors to child porn sites if they were inactive for a certain period.

In all these cases, the central evidence wasn't in dispute: Pornography was on a computer. But proving how it got there was difficult.

Tami Loehrs, who inspected Fiola's computer, recalls a case in Arizona in which a computer was so "extensively infected" that it would be "virtually impossible" to prove what an indictment alleged: that a 16-year-old who used the PC had uploaded child pornography to a Yahoo group.

Prosecutors dropped the charge and let the boy plead guilty to a separate crime that kept him out of jail, though they say they did it only because of his age and lack of a criminal record.

Many prosecutors say blaming a computer virus for child porn is a new version of an old ploy.

"We call it the SODDI defense: Some Other Dude Did It," says James

Anderson, a federal prosecutor in Wyoming.

However, forensic examiners say it would be hard for a pedophile to get away with his crime by using a bogus virus defense.

"I personally would feel more comfortable investing my retirement in the lottery before trying to defend myself with that," says forensics specialist Jeff Fischbach.

Even careful child porn collectors tend to leave incriminating e-mails, DVDs or other clues. Virus defenses are no match for such evidence, says Damon King, trial attorney for the U.S. Justice Department's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section.

But while the virus defense does not appear to be letting real pedophiles out of trouble, there have been cases in which forensic examiners insist that legitimate claims did not get completely aired.

Loehrs points to Ned Solon of Casper, Wyo., who is serving six years for child porn found in a folder used by a file-sharing program on his computer.

Solon admits he used the program to download video games and adult porn - but not child porn. So what could explain that material?

Loehrs testified that Solon's antivirus software wasn't working properly and appeared to have shut off for long stretches, a sign of an infection. She found no evidence the five child porn videos on Solon's computer had been viewed or downloaded fully. The porn was in a folder the file-sharing program labeled as "incomplete" because the downloads were canceled or generated an error.

This defense was curtailed, however, when Loehrs ended her investigation in a dispute with the judge over her fees. Computer exams can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Defendants can ask the courts to pay, but sometimes judges balk at the price. Although Loehrs stopped working for Solon, she argues he is innocent.

"I don't think it was him, I really don't," Loehrs says. "There was too much evidence that it wasn't him."

The prosecution's forensics expert, Randy Huff, maintains that Solon's antivirus software was working properly. And he says he ran other antivirus programs on the computer and didn't find an infection - although security experts say antivirus scans frequently miss things.

"He actually had a very clean computer compared to some of the other cases I do," Huff says.

The jury took two hours to convict Solon.

"Everybody feels they're innocent in prison. Nobody believes me because that's what everybody says," says Solon, whose case is being appealed. "All I know is I did not do it. I never put the stuff on there. I never saw the stuff on there. I can only hope that someday the truth will come out."

But can it? It can be impossible to tell with certainty how a file got onto a PC.

"Computers are not to be trusted," says Jeremiah Grossman, founder of
WhiteHat Security Inc. He describes it as "painfully simple" to get a
computer to download something the owner doesn't want - whether it's a
program that displays ads or one that stores illegal pictures.

It's possible, Grossman says, that more illicit material is waiting to
be discovered.

"Just because it's there doesn't mean the person intended for it to be
there - whatever it is, child porn included."

Web-based E-mail Features Come to Desktop Software

E-mail has taken a full circle.

Over the years, Web-based e-mail services have gotten much better,
sporting many features once available only with the e-mail programs that
reside on the computer desktop.

Now, those desktop programs are borrowing from their Web-based
counterparts, such as Google Inc.'s Gmail.

The new version of Mozilla's Thunderbird, due out in the next few weeks,
lets you keep your inbox clutter-free with a Gmail-like "archive" button
for permanently storing older messages, while removing them from
day-to-day sight.

Thunderbird 3 also introduces tabbed e-mail - akin to tabbed browsing
available on most Web browsers, including Mozilla's own Firefox. You can
quickly jump back and forth between e-mail messages by opening them in
separate tabs.

David Ascher, CEO of Mozilla Messaging, said that when Thunderbird was
first created, the only decent programs around were desktop-based ones
such as Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook. For the latest version, Ascher said,
Mozilla looked for ideas everywhere, including other e-mail programs
that happened to be Web-based.

That might suggest the time has come to ditch desktop programs
completely, now that they are playing catch-up rather than the other way
around.

But Ascher said desktop systems still provide advantages for many users -
particularly those with multiple e-mail accounts over multiple services.

The new Thunderbird software offers improvements for merging messages
from those accounts into a single mailbox. Before, you could do that
only for e-mail systems supporting the POP3 protocol; that's been
expanded to include IMAP, used by Time Warner Inc.'s AOL and many
workplace systems.

Search has also improved to be more like the Web. Think of e-shopping
sites that let you narrow your choices by clicking on a specific brand
name or price range to the left. Thunderbird will now let you do that
with e-mail, narrowing the search results using such criteria as whether
there's an attachment and who the sender is.

Apple Plans 40-50 Store Openings in 2010

Apple Inc said on Thursday it plans to open 40 to 50 retail stores next
year as the consumer electronics giant expands its reach to customers.

More than half of the new stores will be outside the United States, with
new outlets planned in London, Paris and two in Shanghai.

Speaking ahead of a store opening in New York, Ron Johnson, Apple's
senior vice president of retail, said the company expects the holiday
selling season to be a good one.

Apple now operates 280 stores in 10 countries.

The stores, first launched in 2001, have proved to be hugely popular
with consumers. Apple hosted 45.9 million store visitors during the
September quarter, up 7 percent from a year earlier.

The stores posted revenue of $1.87 billion in the quarter, their highest
level ever and up 9 percent from a year earlier.

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